4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

sometimes it is too late, for it may have already gone overboard. The Arab usually has no lines ready when he comes into a mooring and he may just as often throw a loose anchor over as not.

Dhows never show lights of any kind at night, whether under way or anchored. Although British regulations have forced many dhows from various ports on the Indian Ocean to carry lights, there is unfortunately no way of forcing the Arabs to use them. This undoubtedly results from centuries of travel in pirate-infested waters, where a light at night served only as a signal for sudden attack from pirates. There is only a weak light in the binnacle with which to see the course; everything else is dark. Not even when in the sea lanes off South Arabia, in the Persian Gulf, or in the Red Sea, where freighters and tankers beat a constant path, does the dhow show a light. In case of collision at night, the boat that can prove that it showed lights has a legal edge.

At the West Pier at Ras Tanura on the Persian Gulf, there is often considerable movement of Arab dhows and Arab *lanchs* (kerosene-driven native launches). Dhows slip in and out of their mooring like shadows on nights so black that a dirty white sail could not be seen ten feet away. One night a *lanch*, all of which carry lights, hit a rock-laden dhow amidship and in a matter of seconds sent her to the bottom in forty feet of water. Native divers unloaded her, and she was eventually salvaged. Since then, dhows make a frantic attempt to fan their coffee fires up to a bright glow when they see any *lanch* lights approaching, but they still do not carry standard lights. It is an eerie sight to see the glow of a charcoal fire suddenly light up a large lateen sail directly in your path!

When sailing along their own coasts, the Arabs like to sail in two's and three's. This arises from the fact that piracy is by no means a thing of the past. For centuries piracy and robbery were honorable professions among many tribes along the long Arabian littoral; such a reputation did the piratical Omani have during the last half of the last century that the very sight of their characteristic *bedans* and *batils* brought actual fear to the population of Zanzibar.[40] Niebuhr noted dangerous conditions in the Red Sea two centuries ago:

> Although from pirates properly so called, there is little to be feared in the Arabic gulfh [Red Sea], yet, so unskilled are the mariners in these latitudes, that they dare not venture to any distance from the coasts. This timorous mode of sailing might expose a single vessel to the robbery of the Arabs; to avoid which, these ships sail in little fleets; four always setting out together, that they may join to defend themselves.[41]

[40] G. L. Sulivan, *Dhow Chasing* (London, 1873), p. 102.

[41] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), I, 212.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

It was in the Red Sea that an American ship was plundered in the early nineteenth century; however, the pirates came from the South Arabian coast. This has been described by Osgood:

> Conspicuous among the former rulers of Dhafar was Seyed Mohammad Akil, who . . . was led by ambition and avarice to turn pirate. Among other prizes, in June 1806, he captured, plundered, and burned near the harbor of Hodeida, in the Red Sea, the American ship *Essex*, belonging to Salem, and commanded by Joseph Orne. Captain Orne had arrived in the *Essex* at Mocha with sixty thousand dollars to purchase coffee. He was persuaded to sail from Mocha for Hodeida by Mohammad Akil, who, keeping him company in an armed ship, seized the vessel soon after leaving Mocha, and slaughtered all on board except a Dutch boy named John Herman Poll, whom he carried to Dhafar. The young man was kept in servitude, educated as a Mahometan, married and had several children, and when last visited, within a few years, seemed perfectly contented with his lot, having nearly forgotten his mother tongue.[42]

While the Red Sea is now perfectly safe from such attacks, many areas of the long Arabian littoral in the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf are definitely not. O'Shea[43] relates that in the Persian Gulf as late as 1944 a large Arab dhow bound for the Trucial Coast of Oman with foodstuffs was attacked by a Persian dhow and the whole Arab crew murdered. Representations were made to the Iran government by the Political Agent of Trucial Oman; the pirates were supposedly apprehended and hanged by the Iran government.

Around the Kuria Muria Islands off the South Arabian coast, the coastal tribes are very piratical. Villiers[44] relates that in recent times the tribes on the Arabian coast near these islands have been known to seize ships at night, plunder the cargo, burn the ship and sell the crew in the interior. They have also been known to cut moorings at night, thereby allowing the ship to drift onto the rocks; then they salvage the cargo. This is apparently nothing new, for when Bent sailed along these coasts in the late 1890's, he noted the extreme suspicion of dhow sailors for the inhabitants of the coast:

> While at anchor we heard shouts and cries to come to land, but our sailors would do nothing of the sort. They said a single man might often be seen calling that he was wrecked, and asking to be fetched away, but a party of armed men would be behind a rock, and come out and murder the benevolent crew and steal the boat.[45]

[42] Osgood, *Notes of Travel* (Salem, 1854), pp. 119-120.
[43] R. O'Shea, *The Sand Kings of Oman* (London: Methuen and Company, 1947), p. 116.
[44] A. Villiers, *SS*, pp. 292-295.
[45] T. Bent, *Southern Arabia* (London: Smith Elder and Co., 1900), p. 279.

721 619 Parts of this coast are as dangerous for Europeans as for Arabs, and in some instances more so for Europeans. Even as late as December 1949 on the supposedly peaceful coast of the Aden Protectorate an act of violence occurred against a British-owned yacht. I talked to the survivors several months later in Mukalla. They related how the 110-foot motor launch *Anne Loretta* with an Englishman, his wife, and one Arab crewman was cruising a little off shore when she touched a sand bar. The captain went ashore to lay out a stern anchor and was seized by the Arabs of the local Ardiab tribe on the coast; then his wife and the Arab went ashore to see what had happened and were likewise seized. Several British officials to whom I talked admitted that these two English people came very close to death in the hands of these unpacified coastal inhabitants. The British explanation was that the area was between the Eastern and Western Aden Protectorates where the tribes had not been pacified, and the yacht should never have landed there.

IV

505 Every Arab dhow of ocean-going tonnage has a captain *(nakhoda)*, a mate, three quartermasters (or helmsmen), a boatswain, and perhaps a boatswain's mate in addition to the crew. The total complement on a 100-ton ship may be from twenty to twenty-five men, while on a 200-ton ship there will be from thirty-five to forty men. The small coasters of up to 50 tons have crews up to eight or ten; there are no officials on these [291] small craft outside of the *nakhoda*. There is no formal dress on a dhow; often it is difficult to tell the *nakhoda* from the crew, as everyone usually wears simply a loin cloth or the long Arab gown and a head cloth.

A *nakhoda* is much more than the word 'captain' implies; he acts as navigator, pilot, shipwright, sailmaker, ropemaker, agent for buying and selling cargo, agent for freight, agent for recruiting passengers, cashier, bookkeeper, judge, and arbitrator. So completely does the *nakhoda* handle the ship and the ship's affairs that the mate has little to do when the *nakhoda* is aboard. Only when the *nakhoda* leaves the ship does the mate take over; that is the mate's only excuse for existence.

505 396 Many of the Kuwait ships on the run to Africa carry carpenters aboard —not as ship's carpenters, but for the construction of small dhows for sale in African waters. Presumably they can sell them profitably in Africa at a price cheaper than the local boatbuilders! However, a small 10-ton dhow that was built aboard the Kuwait *bhum* on which Villiers sailed down the African coast, had to be left on the beach at Zanzibar in charge of a ship's agent, because the dhow could not be sold at the price de-

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East Maritime Arabs Mkg

The larger ports of
Kuwait, Bahrein and Dibai have also a large community of artisans and lesser merchants. These serve not simply the local diving population, but also act as manufacturers and wholesalers for the whole of Central Arabia. Practically the entire import and export trade for the interior of the peninsula goes through these three towns, and the merchant and artisan communities are large and prosperous.

It is difficult to be optimistic about the general situation in these pearl-diving communities. The actual material condition of the divers is bad enough, but worse by far is the discouragement and despair that have settled down upon the whole community. No one tries very hard to get out of debt, for he knows that barring some unforeseen miracle, he cannot do so no matter how long and hard he works and how economically he lives. There is little thrift; a stranger is often shocked by the waste that divers show in their personal and household expenditures. There is not the slightest effort, for instance, to discover what sort of clothing will give the most service for the money invested. Expensive or cheap, economical or wasteful, it is all the same. With luck when the present supply of money is gone, the captain will make another liberal allowance, and nothing better than that can be hoped for, no matter what economy and thrift are practised.

The conditions outlined above are those that obtain in the northern towns, chiefly in Bahrein. There is a second large diving community in the region known as the Pirate Coast, whose capital and largest city is Dibai. Its piratical character is a matter of history now long past, but it still makes a good deal of trouble for the British who police the Gulf and maintain order along the coast.

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Martinic Arabs MK2

721 Political troubles became acute some ten years ago or more, and for many years no foreigner was allowed to land on that coast. It was a double pleasure, then, to be invited to visit that part of Arabia four years ago. It 567 is the one remaining nest of slavery in eastern Arabia and the district is still troublesome at times to the bearers of constituted authority, but nothing of that sort is ap- 511 parent to the visiting doctor. The rich and the poor alike are most courteous and pleasant hosts.

228 In this district the pearl-diving system is the same as 461 in Bahrein, but the men do not work nearly so hard. They set out to work later in the season, although if the temperature of the water were the only element in their decision, they might be at work sooner, for they lie farther to the south and their water warms up considerably before that near Bahrein. They return to the shore oftener and show much less energy in their work. The pearl banks in the region of the Pirate Coast are less rich than the Bahrein banks, and as might be expected, their catch is much less valuable than that of the boats farther 511 north. It is interesting to see that divers on the Pirate Coast live at about the same general level as those in Bahrein. They could not live at a much lower level, for it would mean starvation. The larger receipts in the Bahrein area have as their only result the creation of a much richer class of pearl merchants than the similar class on the Pirate Coast.

x-7 Unquestionably it is the slaves who have reduced the 464 standards of what a day's and a season's work ought to 461 be to its present level on the Pirate Coast. Most of these slaves are negroes from Africa. A few are Baluchs from the Makran coast between India and Persia. They do not number over one-half the divers, probably far

* [The Pirate Coast and its capital at Dibai --Analyst]